

## [Them 'toxicated Wild Geese]

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NEW YORK [10?] Forms to be Filled out for Each Interview

FORM A Circumstances of Interview

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 W. 12 St., N.Y.C.

DATE January 12, 1939

SUBJECT "THEM 'tOXICATED WILD GEESE"...An Uncle Steve Robertson Story

1. Date and time of interview January 6, 1939
2. Place of interview
3. Name and address of informant Harry Reece (Daca) 63 Washington Square South New York City
4. Name and address of person, if any, who put you in touch with informant. See previous interviews 11/29/38'— "Harry Reece: His Story"
5. Name and address of person, if any, accompanying you
6. Description of room, house, surroundings, etc.

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NEW YORK

FORM C Text of Interview (Unedited)

STATE New York

NAME OF WORKER Earl Bowman

ADDRESS 86 West 12th St., N.Y.C.

DATE January 11, 1939

SUBJECT "THEM 'tOXICATED WILD GEESE"...An Uncle Steve Robertson Story  
(Narrated by Harry Reece)

My Uncle Steve Robertson, who was a very famous Pioneer of the Far West in an early day indeed, not only declared many times (generally as a prelude to one of his remarkable tales) that he ... "jest natcherally despised any cussed individual that 'xeggerates and stretches th' truth till she snaps and flies back and hits him in his doggone face..." but also often remarked that he was quite fond of what he called "corn licker" - and "specially home-made corn licker."

Uncle Steve always hastened to qualify his confession of fondness for "corn licker" by adding: "Howsomever, being a human, like I am - and a Pioneer - I ain't in favor of bein' so damned fond of corn licker they is — that I believe a man is justified in drinkin' so cussed much of it at one time that he turns hisself into a darned wild goose, like some damn fool wild geese I knowed oncet, an' gits plumb 'soused' and 'toxicated and non compus. Yeah, I-Gawd, a man-and 'specially a pioneer like me's got to have some self-control and not be a darn wild goose when it comes to bein' fond of corn licker..."

Up to that time, [having] had very little experience as a Pioneer in the Far West, and even less with wild geese and "corn licker," I was not aware that wild geese had any degree of fondness whatever for corn licker, home-made or otherwise, or indulged in alcoholic stimulation to any extent, let alone to the extent of becomming "soused" and "non compus."

It was while we were in camp at [Malheur?] Lake, over in eastern Oregon where Uncle Steve and I had gone to shoot a wild duck or two, and when I suggested to Uncle Steve that it was a new one on me... he told me the story....

"Hell, yes, wild geese is th' most intemperate things for 'corn licker' you ever seen!" Uncle Steve said, as if surprised at my ignorance. "Yeah, wild geese jest can't resist corn licker - and 'specially home-made corn licker like Bob White an' me used to make when we first settled in Salubria Valley up in the Weiser River country, in Idaho.

"That was one thing us pioneers didn't dare run short of ... we jest natcherally had to always have a good supply of 'corn' on hand, 'cause we never could tell when we might git snakebit or something. So, Bob an' me, bein' from Missouri or Arkansas, as a matter of course always carried a 'coil' we'd brung out from Missouri when we migrated out to the Far West, and would keep a good supply made up.

"That's how we happened to find out that wild geese is plumb fond of, and doggone fools about, corn licker..."

"And it's a good thing we found it out too, 'cause it helped us bear th' hardships of bein' Pioneers in the Far West in 3 the [absodamnedulety?] Early Days indeed.

"People now-a-days don't realize what hardships us Pioneers went through in them early days in the Far West... I-Gawd, how we ever endured it, I don't know!

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"Take-like when Bob White an' me and 'Man' — she was bob's wife — first migrated into Salubria Valley. There we was jest practically in a raw country with nothing much but ourselves to depend on. We didn't have no money, and if we had a-had there wasn't no stores closer than a week's travel to spend it at if we'd a-had it...

"Natcherally us Pioneers got along the best we could.

"We jest went and cut down trees an' built a house an' plowed up some land and planted some corn and potatoes and other stuff and had to eat what we raised ourselves or got from the hills or the rivers ...

"I-Gawd, there was weeks at a time when we didn't have no meat except venison and bear and grouse and pheasants and things like that. Of course we always had plenty of trout by jest goin' and ketchin' 'em out of th' Weiser River, and when the spring run of salmon come up th' river we'd spear a few hundred pounds and salt 'em down an' [somke?] 'em so we'd have 'em jest in a emergency... Once in a while Bob an' me would cut a wild bee tree and git three or four hundred pounds of honey, and in summers, Man, Bob's wife, would can up a lot of huckleberries... Yeah, I-Gawd, people now-days don't realize what us Pioneers in the Far West had to go through in th' early days when we was jest developin' th' country.

"Bob an' me stood it pretty well, but it was shore hell on Man; and it was worse after Bob an' me had gathered our corn off th' fifteen or twenty acres we'd planted and had made 4 up probably thirty or forty gallons of licker jest in case we might need it.

"It was when th' corn was all gathered, them damn wild geese started comin' in and lightin' on the corn field to pick up what corn Bob an' me had maybe overlooked while we was pickin' the crop...

"I-Gawd, hundreds of 'em would come honkin' down th' river, circle around a few times and settle down out there in that corn field. At first Mam didn't pay much attention to 'em then finally she got such a cravin' for wild goose she couldn't hardly stand it. Go, she said:

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“Bob, you or [steve?] one or the other's got to go out there and shoot a wild goose or two — I ain't had a taste of wild goose for so long I'm jest dyin' for a mess of goose. Besides, she said, “anybody'll starve to death if they don't have nothing but venison and bear and pheasant and grouse and trout, without ever gittin' a change... It ain't [healthy?] to eat th' same things all the time, so, one or the other of you has jest got to go out there th' next time them wild geese come in on that corn field and git a mess of 'em for me...” That's what Mam told Bob and me an' I-Gawd it worried us a lot, 'cause we was runnin' awful short of amunition - in fact we was plumb out of shot for our shot-guns and didn't dare use our rifle ammunition for shootin' wild geese 'cause we might have to use it to shoot a deer or a bear or something like that, or maybe a couple of Indians or so if they come around and got to botherin' like they sometimes done.

“But Man kept frettin' about wantin' some wild geese till Bob an' me figured somethin' had to be done about it, so Bob said, “Steve, I-Gawd, we gotta do somethin' about this an' 5 git some of them wild geese for Man or else she's goin' to drive me crazy harpin' about wantin' 'em, and I'll be damned, Steve, Bob said, ‘if I know how th' hell we can git 'em unless we shoot 'em an' you know cussed well we can't spare no amunition jest at this time to shoot no doggone wild geese, - so what in [hell-an'-blazes?] are we goin' to do about it?”

“So, I told Bob jest to leave it to me and I'd figger it out someway, 'cause, I told him, if there's more'n one way to skin a cat, I-Gawd, there must be more'n one way to git some wild geese without ever shootin' 'em. Somehow or other I'd figger it out, I told Bob.

“But Bob didn't think we could git any of them wild geese for Mam unless we shot 'em and wasted some of our ammunition, which neither one of us thought we ought to do on account of how the Indians was beginnin' to act. Maybe we could make a trap like a rabbit-trap and bait it with a nubbin of corn, Bob said, but who th' hell ever heard of a wild goose bein' caught in a tray? Wild geese is too cussed smart to be caught in any damn trap, Bob said, even if it was baited with a half dozen nubbins of corn...

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"Bob was jest about discouraged over th' whole thing and he honestly felt awful bad 'cause Mam didn't have nothing much to eat but venison and bear steaks and trout and smoked salmon and grouse and pheasants and sich course eatin' like that and craved wild goose so damned bad...

"But I wasn't discouraged, an' told Bob so 'cause a Pioneer like I was in the Far West in the early days jest could not afford to git discouraged. He was takin' too many chances chances if he did, and no matter what kind of a problem rared up in front of him he jest nacherally had to figger it out. So I-Gawid, I 6 knowed I'd have to figger out how to git same of them wild geese without shootin' 'em. And, I-Gawd, I figgered her out...

"When Bob mentioned settin' a trap and baitin' it with a nubbin or two of corn, I got an idea I knowed darned well ought to work...

"And she did.

"So, I said, I got it figgered out, Bob. Go git one of Man's wash tubs and bring it down to the corn crib. Hell, Bob said, you ain't goin' to try to use one of Mam's wash tubs for a trap to ketch them wild geese in, are you? Bob told me.

"Hell, no, I told Bob. I ain't so danged ign'rant as to try anything like that... But I am goin' to mix my damned bait in the wash tub, I told him.

"Well, Bob and me took Man's tub down to th' corn crib and shelled it about two thirds full of corn, then we carried it up to th' house and filled it plumb full of corn licker Bob and me'd made not long before...

"There, I told Bob, now we'll jest cover her up and let it set there all night and let th' corn soak in th' corn licker, then we'll take it down to th' corn field in th' morning before th' wild geese begin to arrive and spread the corn out and see what happens.

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"Well, I-Gawd, th' next mornin' all that corn licker had soaked in that corn Bob an' me'd shelled in th' tub and the grains of corn was swelled up 'bout twice as big as natural, and every cussed grain was loaded with a hell-of-a-jolt of about th' strongest corn licker anybody ever scorched their throats with, 'cause Bob and me believed in makin' it strong when we did make it.

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"So, we took it down to the corn field and spread it out like we said, then we hid in the brush by the side of the corn field and watched...

"Pretty soon them wild geese commenced comin' in, and when they lit they made a bee-line for that corn-licker-soaked corn we'd spread out... I reckon, probably they smelled it.

"I-Gawd, I never seen anybody or anything git drunk as quick an' as drunk as them dam fool wild geese did. It was kind of funny but plumb pathetic to see how cussed intemperate them wild geese was when they started in on that corn-licker-soaked corn...

"Some of 'em would gobbled down a few grains of corn, then a sort of surprised look would come in their eyes if they didn't jest know for certain what was happenin' to 'em. Others of 'em would stretch their cussed necks up an' try to honk and then change their minds and try to crow like a rooster pheasant... And, I-Gawd, one bit old gander jest up an' tried his damndest to howl like a wolf. It was plumb pitiful to watch, but it didn't last long...

"In danged nigh no time a-tall all them wild geese was 'toxicated and soused to beat hell, and had jest tumbled over on the ground to sleep it off, totally unconscious. So that's th' way it was...

"Bob and me went and got the mules hitched up to th' wagon, and drove down and corded all them 'toxicated wild geese in the wagon, and hauled 'em up to th' house and put 'em in a pen. There was a hundred an' seventeen of 'em — Well, not exactly a hundred an' seventeen, maybe, 'cause one of 'em jolted out of th' wagon as Bob and me was haulin'

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'em to th' 8 house and we didn't notice it to be plumb truthful an' accurate, mebbe there was only a hundred an' sixteen...

"But anyhow, there was enough for us to have a wild goose to mix in with th' venison and bear steaks and trout and things like that for quite a while - and Man quit sufferin' so much for a change of things to eat.

"Yeah, I-Gawd, us Pioneers in th' Far West in the early days shore-as-hell had to do lots of things people now-a-days don't have to do... But, I-Gawd, when he had to, we shore as hell done 'em....."

("My Uncle Steve Robertson had no respect whatever for anybody who 'xeggerates or who drinks corn licker an' ain't got no more self control than a danged wild goose an' gits 'toxicated an 'soused.") END